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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses possible uses for student communication journals in the interpersonal communication classroom. Appropriate interpretation of student journal entries can clarify the effectiveness of instructional games and simulations, stimulate integration of experience-based affective learning systems within a sound theoretical framework, and promote changes within the teacher/student interpersonal relationship. A typical journal entry is outlined and analyzed with regard to how it meets the above conditions. In addition, an actual entry from a student journal is discussed. (Author/KS)

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THE COMMUNICATION JOURNAL:

A NEW TOOL FOR BUILDING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

IN THE COMMUNICATION CLASSROOM

by

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the use of a new instructional tool for the Interpersonal Communication Classroom. The need for this tool is identified through the discussion of three primary questions:

1. Can there be an effective instructional application of games and simulations in the interpersonal classroom?
2. How can we integrate experienced-based affective learning systems within a sound theoretical framework?
3. What influence will the affective approach to learning have on the teacher-student interpersonal relationship?

To answer these questions the paper analyzes recent research on the use of games and simulations in classrooms, identifies the lack of sound integration of theory with experienced-based activities in current material, and finally suggests a shift in emphasis in the interpersonal relationship that develops between the teacher and the student.

The tool detailed is the Communication Journal. A typical journal entry is outlined with emphasis on how it meets the needs expressed in the above questions. A sample entry from one journal is included in the discussion.

The Communication Journal:
A New Tool for Building Interpersonal Relationships
in the Communication Classroom

Stimulating openness, authenticity, self-disclosure, and trust are the course objectives most often identified by authors of Interpersonal Communication materials (see: Barbour and Goldberg, 1974, p. 28; Clark, Erway, and Leebeltzer, 1971, p. 13; and Galvin and Book, 1972, p. 13). There is a growing acceptance among communication specialists to approach these goals through experienced-based, affective learning systems. The growing use of communication games and simulations in the communication classroom is an indication of this general acceptance of the importance of the affective domain. The renewed interest in "learning by doing" has been stimulated by recent critics of education including Bruner (1971), Rogers (1969), and Silberman (1970, 1973). Focus on the affective domain, or dealing with "...the practical life... the capacity for feeling, concern, attachment or detachment, sympathy, empathy, and appreciation" (Weinstein and Fantini, 1970, p. 24), has come from many disciplines including social psychology, sociology, organizational psychology, as well as the field of communication.

Although the objectives of many Interpersonal Communication courses are clothed in affective language, three factors appear to keep instructors from actually teaching such courses from an experiential learning framework. These factors are: inexperience with affective teaching techniques, a lack of well developed tools to aid the designing of a total course outline, and the size of many communication classes.

In the recent Needs Assessment Report for the International Communication Association (Porter, 1975), one of the specific recommendations suggested workshops focusing on "...applications of instructional communication research to academic courses and professional training programs" (p. 6). This recommendation was based on needs expressed by ICA members. Clearly, academicians want experience and training in applying theoretical concepts to the classroom environment.

Class size seems to be another factor recognized by teachers as a difficult obstacle in designing more personalized courses. Gibson, Kline, and Grunner (1974) indicate that basic communication classes sometimes are as large as forty students. One of the most significant problems identified by those surveyed was that classes are too large. Ideally, a basic Interpersonal Communication class would contain ten - fifteen students and one teacher. Pragmatically, faculty members must deal with the reality of college and university policies and standards regulating class size. Teachers need tools that will give them experience in dealing with the affective aspects of teaching, and at the same time help them create the intimate, non-threatening environment necessary for the Interpersonal Communication classroom within the context of larger classes.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze three need areas in light of a new instructional tool that can be used to reach the objectives of an Interpersonal Communication course. The issues are:

1. Can there be an <u>effective</u> instructional application of games and simulations in the interpersonal classroom?
2. How can we integrate experienced-based affective learning systems within a sound theoretical framework?

3. What influence will the affective approach to learning have on the teacher-student interpersonal relationship?

The Use of Communication Games in the Interpersonal Communication Classroom

In the last several years a great deal of research has been conducted to determine the learning value of classroom games and simulations. Games can take the form of classroom interactions where the student is observed communicating in his own personal style, to role playing activities designed to ask students to act as they think the person whose role they are playing would act, to the more extensively developed simulation games designed to correspond as closely as possible to the real life situation it is intended to represent. Livingston (1973) points out that some of these activities have detailed rules and goals depending on the intent of the specific activity. Their use in a communication classroom is for the purpose of studying some communication variable and giving students feedback about their own behavior in various communication situations.

The Academic Games Program conducted research for six years to determine the effect of the use of games in the classroom. The results establish that simulation games can teach facts, concepts, and relationships as effectively as conventional instruction. Additionally, games are better at influencing students' behavior in performance tests. Games also tend to produce marked changes in the expressed attitudes of the players toward persons and activities represented in the game. This would definitely have an impact on the accuracy of students' perceptions in communication situations. Overall, the Academic Games Program supports the claim that games increase students' motivation

to learn (Livingston, 1972). In another extensive research program, Chapman, Davis, and Meier (1974) concluded that games can increase sympathetic understanding about problem situations in which people find themselves.

Perhaps the most recognized effect of games in the classroom was pointed out by Livingston and Stoll (1973). They concluded that simulation and academic games have the ability to motivate students more than traditional approaches to learning (For further support see: Boocock and Schild, 1968; Maidment and Bronstein, 1973; Tansey and Unwin, 1969; and Weinstein and Fantini, 1970).

If the goals of an Interpersonal Communication course are to increase the students' level of understanding and awareness of his own as well as others' communication behavior, it seems obvious that the use of simulation, academic, and/or communication games in the classroom is appropriate. Research seems to intimate that reaching objectives such as stimulating openness, authenticity, self-disclosure and trust, are best approached through experienced-based activities. Within communication research there is much to support the use of games to enhance the learning of communication skills (See: Bochner and Kelly, 1974, p. 293; Clark, Erway, and Beltzer, 1971, p. 126; Harpole, 1975, p. 59-64; Rubin and Budd, 1975, p. 1; Weaver, 1974, p. 302; Wackman, 1975, p. 5).

Since the Interpersonal Communication classroom attempts to make the student more aware of the dynamic, on-going process of one-to-one, face-to-face encounters, it would seem shortsighted not to allow the student to interact with others as they study that process. Barbour and Goldberg express this feeling succinctly when they say, "...to teach interpersonal communication without letting the students engage one another and communicate interpersonally is something akin to teaching bowling by the book and never going to a bowling

alley" (1974, p. 54).

Once we acknowledge the value of communication games in the classroom we then discover a weakness in currently available materials. They provide minimal linkage between the theoretical concepts students read in their texts and the communication games in which they participate in the classroom. Either the theory is too abstract to validate through experienced-based activities or the activities are too far removed from any sound theoretical framework to have meaning for students. Thus it is necessary to address a second question, "How can we integrate experienced-based affective learning systems within a sound theoretical framework?"

Integration of Communication Games and Activities With Sound Theoretical Concepts

With the proliferation of games, activities, and exercises in Interpersonal Communication within the last ten years, (For sources see: Johnson and others, 1974; Krupar, 1973; Langdon-Dahm, 1975; Pfeiffer and Jones, 1970-1975; and Weatherly, 1974) one might expect that the literature would also contain a theory based explanation of the activities as well. Yet a review of literature in Interpersonal Communication reveals that very little help is given to the beginning teacher on how to adequately tie games to theoretical constructs such as: selective perception, cognitive dissonance, interpersonal orientations, descriptive feedback, and interpersonal negotiation. What often happens is that the teacher schooled in the use of traditional lecture format plans an Interpersonal Communication Course around a series of lectures on building interpersonal relationships. Occasionally she/he selects almost at random, some communication game to consume the remaining fifteen - twenty minutes of class time. Most communication games require thirty - sixty minutes

followed by at least fifteen to twenty minutes of "debriefing" or discussion. We want to study the theories related to Interpersonal Communication but we're not sure we want to take adequate class time to allow students to communicate interpersonally and subsequently internalize theories.

This unwillingness or inability to relate theories to practical experience is due in part to the lack of over-all designs for teachers to clearly integrate theoretical concepts and practices. Smith notes: "The tendency of the published literature has been to recommend simulations or games without consideration of the all-important relation of the simulation or game to some theory" (1972, p. 7). Weaver (1974) also alludes to the need for the instructor to have a sound theoretical basis for classroom games. Yet when the teacher searches for materials that comprehensively integrate games and theory she/he is unable to find it.

To begin with, many of the exercise booklets available to teachers have a few directions for the running of the game, but make no attempt to integrate each game within the context of some theory or concept. For example, the Ratliffe and Herman text (1973) divides exercises into typical communication headings (such as: perception, symbols, beliefs, decision-making, emotional climates), but lacks adequate instruction for the teacher directing the activities. Hays' text (1974) does not organize exercises into integral parts of the communication process, while Valett's manual (1974) is really a do-it-yourself book with minimal theoretical ties, as are Schultz's text (1967) and Stevens' collection (1971). These books do not seem appropriate for the beginning teacher as they require considerable skill at developing your own conceptual framework(s). Curwin and others (1972) focus on value classification, and do help to develop student awareness of her/his own values, but again require that the teacher have the necessary background skills to integrate

practice with appropriate communication concepts.

While some of the sources contain excellent games and exercises, most take an experienced teacher to integrate these games successfully with cognitive concepts. Many basic texts have attempted to include activities in an instructor's manual (See instructor's manuals accompanying: Keltner, 1970; Giffin and Patton, 1971; Johnson and others, 1974; Pace and Boren, 1972; Ruben and Budd, 1975; and Sereno and Bodaken, 1975). While some of these manuals have done a better job than others at integrating concepts and activities, there still seems to be a final link missing between participating in a game in class and analyzing and studying theories of communication.

Several recently published books seem to be moving in the direction of providing the teacher with more aid as she or he designs the total course perspective (e.g., see: Galvin and Book, 1972, and Johnson and others, 1974). Others seem to be attempting to reach the teacher's own perspective and stimulate ideas for approaching the classroom from an experienced-based foundation (See: Greer and Rubinstein, 1972; Mohrmann, 1974; and Samples and Wohlford, 1973).

In short, the field needs more designs combining theoretical concerns with the skills practiced in the classroom. Along with making such designs available to teachers, there also seems to be a need for teachers to confront the question: "What should be the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the student in an Interpersonal Communication class?"

The Interpersonal Relationship of the Teacher and the Student

Carl Rogers maintains:

> When the facilitator is a real person, being what he is, entering into a relationship with the learner without presenting a front or

> a facade, he is much more likely to be effective. This means that the feelings which he is experiencing are available to him, available to his awareness, that he is able to live these feelings, be them, and able to communicate them if appropriate. It means that he comes into a direct personal encounter with the learner, meeting him on a person-to-person basis. It means that he is being himself, not denying himself. (underlining not Rogers') (Silberman and others, 1972, p. 59)

One of the most, if not the most, influential aspects of the learning environment, is the quality of the relationship developing between the teacher and the student. Silberman (1970), identifies the teacher-student relationship as a key issue in education. He contends, "What educators must realize is that how they teach and how they act may be more important than what they teach. The way we do things shapes values more directly and more effectively than the way we talk about them" (p. 9).

The interpersonal classroom should promote analysis of the communication process with specific emphasis on the process as it occurs between students and between students and teacher. To attempt to create an artificial "distance" between the teacher and the student and then study the development of interpersonal attraction, effectiveness, and improving interpersonal relationships, seems to be a great contradiction. The artificial distance might serve as a study of barriers in communicating but certainly would not enhance the students' learning of the components for building an effective interpersonal relationship. How can we teach interpersonal communication and not relate interpersonally with our students? Several communication studies and resources point to the same conclusion in their discussion of teaching techniques and the relationship between the teacher and the student (See: Barbour and

Goldberg, 1974, pp. 5, 43, 48, 54-55; Bochner and Kelly, 1974, p. 17; Brown and VanRiper, 1974, p. 43; Clark and others, 1971, p. 7; and Tubbs, 1974, p. 3). These authors point to the importance of the teacher's behavior in establishing a strong interpersonal relationship in the classroom setting.

Essentially, the problem is: how can a teacher effectively build an interpersonal relationship with thirty students at the same time? How can we change the "one to many" aspect of the environment to one in which the teacher and student interact freely with one another?

An answer to this question, as well as the ones raised by the issue of the use of games in the classroom and the integration of affective learning materials with theoretical concepts, is through the use of a communication journal.

Component Parts of the Communication Journal

The communication journal is written by students reflecting their attitudes, feelings, and the expansion of their cognitive learning as the course progresses. First, it provides the teacher with a variety of simulation and communication games to be used in the classroom. Second, it continually asks the student to reflect on class activities and see the relationship between the experience in class and a specific theory mentioned in one textbook. Consequently, the journal provides for positive reinforcement of a concept while at the same time allowing the student to develop more self awareness. Finally, since the instructor is the only one who reads the journal, it also allows for the development of an interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the student.

Although the journal concept has been identified by several communication authors (See: Teacher's manual for Brook's text, 1971, p. VIII;

teacher's manual for Keltner's text, 1970, p. 22; and Weaver, 1974, p. 311), few well developed journals are available for use in the classroom. Three such instruments include ones developed by Phelps and DeWine (1976), Myers and Myers (1973), and Rosenfeld, Goldhaber, and Smith (1975).

The journal concept is to have students keep a "diary-like" record of their observations of each class activity plus respond to specific questions listed in the journal that refer to theories which an activity is designed to illustrate.

As Phelps and DeWine have pointed out (1976):

> By having students participate in interpersonal activities and then answer questions which ask them to relate their interpersonal experiences to the theoretical material in their textbooks, we have found that students are better able to understand their own interpersonal behaviors. (p. 3)

Since the Phelps and DeWine journal most clearly links theories to in-class activities,[1] it might be helpful to look more closely at the component parts of one journal entry.

Within each section of a unit there are three basic components: the instructor's page, the students' page, and the actual journal entry pages where students respond to theoretical as well as practical questions. By giving the instructor detailed directions on how to run the activity, what type of responses to expect from the students, variations to be used with the exercise, and discussion questions to follow the activity, the teacher has an integrated design available. Within that design, communication concepts of concern are outlined so that the instructor can clearly relate theories to the activity itself. Probably most important, the journal entry,

by listing specific concepts discussed in the text, allows the student to integrate what she/he is reading with her/his experiences in the classroom.

Figures #1, 2, and 3 are excerpts from the Phelps and DeWine Journal. They represent one part, of one unit, within the journal. In order that such a journal satisfy the three previously stated objectives, it is necessary that it: provide some communication activity or game to be used in the classroom that is appropriate for a typical unit that would be taught during the course of the class, that it focus on one or more theoretical concepts, and that it provide a way for students to respond to the teacher in two areas: her or his own feelings and reactions to a class activity (personal reflection) and a demonstration of her/his understanding and ability to apply some specific communication theory discussed in her/his text or in class.

A closer examination of the excerpt from the Phelps and DeWine Journal in Figures #1, 2, and 3 will clarify these points.

In this particular entry the focus is on developing specific listening skills while at the same time emphasizing basic theoretical statements about listening behavior (See text references listed at the end of the first journal question).

Journal entries should be strictly confidential between the instructor and the student. Importantly, the student should freely explore all facets of his communication skills without feeling threatened.

The instructor would need to develop her or his own method of evaluating such a journal. Some might want to use it in place of short quizzes, others might want it to play a major role in the students' evaluation. This author prefers to make the journal an integral part of the learning process and consequently weighs it heavily in the overall student evaluation. Whether

the instructor evaluates the journal at all, is a decision each instructor must make. It is best, however, not to evaluate or grade questions that call for a student's reflections on her or his own communication behavior or feelings about communication situations, or personal observations and responses to questions requiring self-disclosure. Questions calling specifically for the relating of theories to class activities are more easily and fairly evaluated.

The instructor will also need to decide how much time she/he will devote to reading these journals. If they are submitted weekly, evaluation may become a burden, depending, of course, on the number of students enrolled in the class(es).

The instructor may want to use one of the currently available journals or develop one of her or his own. In either case, the unique quality of the journal technique lies in its ability to tie class experiences to specific theories referenced in the course, provide meaningful affective experienced-based activities, and encourage the development of a strong interpersonal relationship between the teacher and student.

In suggesting the use of a relatively new teaching tool, this paper has attempted to answer three basic questions:

1. Can there be an effective instructional application of games and simulations in the interpersonal classroom?
   The answer is definitely yes.
2. How can we integrate experienced-based affective learning systems within a sound theoretical framework?
   One answer is the use of a student journal which requires students to link theories with class exercises.
3. What influence will the affective approach to learning

"Listening with Empathy"

Objectives: To increase the students' ability to listen for complete understanding and comprehension of the other person's feelings and thoughts

To focus on "empathy" and its use in listening behavior

Time: 30-40 minutes

Procedure: The instructor divides the class into groups of four and assigns one of the group to be the "speaker" and the other three to be "listeners". The speaker is asked to express his views on the following topic: (other topics may be substituted that would lead to a discussion of one's personal feelings and thoughts)

> "Marriage as a viable unit in our modern society is out of date and will soon be replaced with group living units."

While the first person is expressing his views on this topic the other three are to try and "listen with empathy". Empathy means seeing something from the other person's viewpoint--putting yourself in "his shoes". There are three ground rules that the listeners must follow during this exercise:

1. Ask questions to increase your understanding--do not make statements or react in any way that would indicate how you feel about what the person has just said. Your purpose here is only to understand his point of view--you will have your own opportunity to express your viewpoint. Don't ask "disguised questions" (ex. "Don't you really feel that . . ."--is really a way of making a statement of your own but phrasing it as a question so that the other person must assume responsibility for it)
2. Focus on the speaker--physically and mentally (ex. lean toward the person speaking, maintain eye contact, think only of what that person is trying to say)
3. Put yourself in their shoes--try to listen to what they are saying from their point of view.

Each group member should have about 5-7 minutes to express their view on the subject, while the other three members "focus" on that individual.

"Listening with Empathy"

Expected results: At first it will be very difficult for some students to listen without immediately responding with their own feelings and ideas. It is usually helpful if the instructor acts as a roving observer to insure that the groups are following the ground rules or assign one member of each group to specifically watch to make sure that they aren't asking "disguised questions".

For some students this may be the first time in their life that they have had three people devote their attention completely and without interruption toward them and their ideas. It often is a very pleasant experience for these people.

This exercise is an excellent experience in really listening for understanding of another person, to empathize with a person without thinking of your own reactions to what they are saying. Often people are able to begin to understand and accept (not agree) another viewpoint very different from their own.

Variations: Assign one member of the group to act as a "facilitator" who will make sure that the other members follow the group rules. Any time that he feels someone is making a "disguised statement" he will interrupt and ask the person to either rephrase the question or ask another that would ask for more information.

Discussion:

1. How can you tell when another person is listening closely to what you are saying?
2. What attitudes and behaviors keep us from being able to empathize with another person?
3. Did you feel that the other group members clearly understood your point of view? Why?

Figure #1, Except from Phelps and DeWine Journal (1974)

Students' Manual

"Listening With Empathy"

Objectives: To increase your ability to listen for complete understanding and comprehension of the other person's feelings and thoughts

To focus on "empathy" and its use in listening behavior

Procedure:

Your instructor will divide you into groups of four. Each of the four will have an opportunity to express their view on the following topic:

> "Marriage as a viable unit in our modern society is out of date and will soon be replaced with group living units."

For 5-7 minutes at a time one person will express their feelings and attitudes toward the topic while the other three members will act as listeners with the following ground rules:

1. Ask questions to increase your understanding—do not make statements or react in any way that would indicate how you feel about what the person has just said. Your purpose here is only to understand his point of view—you will have your own opportunity to express your viewpoint.

   Don't ask disguised questions:
   "Don't you really feel . . ."—is really a way of making a statement of your own but phrasing it as a question so that the other person must assume responsibility for it.

2. Focus on the speaker—physically and mentally
   lean toward the speaker, maintain eye contact, think only of what that person is trying to say to you

3. Put yourself in their shoes—try to listen to what they are saying from their point of view.

When all members have had a chance to express their feelings and thoughts, discuss the following questions:

1. Did you feel the other group members were really listening to you? What specific behavior did they exhibit that made you reach this conclusion?

2. What were you thinking about as the other individuals talked? Were your thoughts at all distracting to the listening process?

Journal Entry for "Listening With Empathy" Students' Manual

1. Evaluate your listening behavior. How might you improve your ability to listen with empathy? Identify the suggestion made in your text that seems the most helpful to you personally.
   (See: A&T 162-195, B&B 230-238, G&P 135, K 135, K(2nd) 124-143 M,L,&K 23, MAS 167-195, P&B 191, P&G 321, S&B 175-200, S&D 186, T&H 302, W&W 193-198).*

2. In this exercise were the group members sensitive to the way other members reacted to what they were saying? Did they make it easy for others to listen to them? How?

Figure #1, Excerpt from Phelps and DeWine Journal (1976)

3. From what you observed in this exercise, how would you describe the kind of behaviors which make it easy to listen to someone and the kind of behaviors which make it difficult to listen to someone?

4. Additional questions supplied by your instructor and/or your own comments and reactions.

• (in this case, the initials refer to theoretical concepts on listening discussed in each of thirteen leading basic texts, for example: G&P 135 refers to Kim Giffin and Bobby Patton's basic text, page 135. K refers to John Keltner's text, and so on. If the teacher were designing his or her own journal then only one text reference would be listed. This reference comes from a journal designed to be used by teachers using a wide variety of texts)

Figure #3, Except from Phelps and DeWine Journal (1976)

have on the teacher-student interpersonal relationship? Hopefully it will promote more open and intimate interactions between the student and the teacher.

As we continue to provide meaningful experiences for students in Interpersonal Communication, we continue to grow ourselves as well. The Communication Journal: A New Tool for Building Interpersonal Relationships in the Communication Classroom, is one way of achieving both of these goals.

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Footnote

[1] The Phelps and DeWine journal was chosen for review because of the added feature of text referenced questions. The page references that follow journal questions refer to specific communication theories discussed in each of fourteen different basic texts. This feature links theory with in-class activities more directly.